

The child and architecture: «Draw me the house/home»

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Abstract

The child as much as the adult has a few rights upon the city but we have to admit, unfortunately, that he/she is here just to live within this area built by and for the adults. The adult seems to have priority and is privileged when it comes to be part of the city while the child is ignored except for those school places and some rare outdoor spaces. Though some efforts are being made as to the setting up of these kinds of areas, still no consideration is given to anything else. The child with its own characteristics lives in the path of adults, awaiting the time to be in turn an adult himself/ herself childhood is the period when adults shape their physical and psychological personalities: this is why this period is so important to human being. Why then such a careless approach in taking it into consideration when dealing with the environment made more to suit the adult and ignore the child.

It is true that it is a period which will finally catch up with the adult's period, but they will in turn get old, does that mean we should ignore them? The aim of this work is to examine the child and his/her relationship with the main element of the city: the house. We have then chosen to study children's drawings to be able to draw a lesson from what he/she is going to express without being obliged to hold forth about it.

Introduction

While these days everybody seems to be participating and conferring with each other to everything, it looks like a large part of the population is being ignored and stigmatized: we are referring to the children. The objective aimed at through this work is to put the children in the place where they deserve to be and which they have right upon. What is meant here is the right upon the city. We think then that one should reconsider the approach adopted unanimously and which consists in allowing the adults decide about what suits the children without questioning them.

We plead for consciousness rising from adults to systematically consult children when it comes to building spaces. Many attitudes are possible but they have a common element: first taking into account what they have to say —let them express themselves and include their own view in every action linked with the construction of the environment. We will not then talk about their environment but just the environment— They are everywhere, they wander here and there— They are part of the city.

As mentioned above, the aim of this work is to bring children to express their opinions about the house and they choose to say it with drawings. Getting to know their during the decision making process and design of the city

The logic of this work is based on 3 hypotheses:

1. The child has the capacity to create and design areas (spaces), given the opportunity to do it, especially when it comes to express his/her opinion about the house.
2. It is easier for him/her to draw the house than to describe it with words.
3. The drawings collected will help us understand what kind of house they wish.

This work is based in 3 parts:

1. Thematic research on the child and the house and the draw.
2. Field work with the collection of children's drawings on the «house».
3. Observation of these drawings to understand the way children perceive the house.

I. Children's words

We suggest a specific approach: find out what the children have to say about the house they wish to live in with their families. So we are going to let them express themselves. However no «high sounding words» only «silent words» obtained from their drawings. Some kind of silent admission full of meaning.

To reach our objective, we are going to swap roles, getting from the role of educator to the role of the child just for the period of completion of this work, hoping to get back to our own role within more developed thinking with multidisciplinary teams.

We are going to listen to children to reds our education or perfect it. We are going to let them express themselves, speak their word, listen to them and reconsider our view about the spaces they use and thus became theirs, according to their opinions and the way they perceive things. Try to interpret the messages they are sending to us and then draw a lesson from their stories or what they are trying to tell us. The adult is no more the one who is in charge of educating but the child with his view of the world and its environment is going to teach the adult a lesson.

We all know that during these last decades, the adult has tried to be listening to the child and this has been done at various levels.

Although in some countries important progress has been made in that way, in other countries, dealing with poverty, wars or simply with adult's egotism, the child is only in respite: a waiting to be adult quickly to be able to take care of himself/ herself. In our case, which deals with the Algerian child, we noticed that the child is getting more freedom to speak his/her word in the family environment and the school is trying to take into account his/her aspirations, but the result is far from the one anticipated. As to our concerns, we all know that nothing has been done to integrate the child in the process of spaces designs which are allocated to it and where he/she is going to grow up. We have then decided to react and put forward his/her opinions when creating spaces where he/she would have his/her own place as real user and not just granting him/her a few gadget equipment and waiting until he/she gets adult and then recognize him./her as such we will be listening to our children through a universal language which is drawing and then advocate for an architectural and urban education from the understanding of their own expression and perception.

We have chosen the drawing which is an instinctive mode of communication which enables the child to express himself/herself without speaking.

Our approach is then based on drawings made by children living in two districts (day-nursery, school, college, lyceum) to be able to collect information as to the way they «see» the house as an object and to detect the elements, whether permanent, variable or unstable so as to fit them during the design and completion process.

We will ask some students in architecture to join so they could be a good link between the two worlds, the childhood one and the designer one.

Asking children's opinions is not an end in itself or the sole purpose of this work. Such direction is a cornerstone in the construction of a more general conduct aiming at giving our children the possibility to progress in environments they participated to create and which they will in turn transmit to the future generations of children when the time comes for them to swing in the world of adults.

1. The child : A city user

Childhood is a spatiotemporal construction why varies from one society to the other and which affects the first years of human life. The New York Convention set by the United Nations Organization in 1989 has given concrete expression to the definition by including any human being aged less than 18 years. Within this part of the population we can find early childhood (less than 6 years), childhood (6 to 12 years) and adolescence (12 to 18 years). Beyond that we are in front of adults who are responsible of their actions and who live an organized life through activities and committed in the life of the city. This is not the case with the children who only appear through a few activities which are given publicity but which never lead to any concrete affect.

The place of the children has evolved in history and the way adults look at him/her depends on society's values to which he/she belongs. Some personalities have worked and argued in favor of it to change his social status from an individual who has no right to speak to the one who needs to be heard and taken into account. Now considered as a subject with real abilities on the cognitive, social and affective aspects, his place resemble any other citizen's place.

Thus one should not forget that the child is a subject with his own rights from the very moment he/she is born and that he/she should be looked at as a whole individual and not just someone in a constant state of growth, someone unfinished. However he/she still stays a frail person and has to be protected by adults who should always do their best to avoid substitute their own requests and wishes when speaking on his/her behalf.

Childhood is generally only considered as a short lived stage leading the child towards adolescence and then adulthood which will enables him/her to be user of the city. This respite is detrimental to the child because it lays down some kind of exclusion and a marginalization of the environment during a crucial period of his/her life which is the period of his/her physical and psychological development.

To put him/her on the fringe at this period starts inevitably a stigmatization process that he/she will carry all his/her life and that will leave indelible scars.

Integrating the child in the environment means taking into account his specific way of working and, creating for him/her the right spaces means bringing to him close support during the stages and progress of his/her psychomotor development, to his settlement, to his exploring and to his commitment in the world.

To create spaces for them is not only to count on a functioning described as perfect, because, as Dimitri Germanos (from Aristote University of SALONIKA) says: «The way of

working relates back to the principles of behavior from a perfect user —Yet, in daily life using spaces does not necessarily follow the principals of working recommended— The subject would develop his own strategies of use which often lead to a symbolic reorganization of the space»¹

The child is a potential consumer and has become a privileged interlocutor in the big consumer market (toys, equipment, furniture, books and above all a big consumer of pictures with the growing access to the virtual world. Producers have understood that and are thus making great efforts to get their products most attractive. The situation should be the same for those designers of spaces within the city where they would take into consideration their aspirations, their words and what their body expresses.

We should not forget that whenever a child grows up, there is still another one coming to take its place, and that «doing» for a child is doing permanently for the child.

2. Home: an unquestionable place

When we refer to the very interesting story of architecture we think monuments and buildings are its best expression but we occasionally talk about the house. Its disparate status, not a monument but still not an object, the house as expressed by Marie-Ange Brayer, was referred to through a «short story»² which does not necessarily mean that basically the house is or could be less valuable. Anthropology, sociology, poetry, literature and painting took into account the house and dealt with this subject while architecture failed to do so. Many studies dealt differently about it.

But why is the house always a contemporary subject, never outdated. To understand its importance, we will focus on the different disciplines that highlighted it through specialized writers.

We will begin with Gaston Bachelard (Philosopher and phenomenologist, 1884-1962). In his well-known book *La poétique de l'espace*³ he based his philosophical thoughts about the house on a dream-like and poetic observation. Uplifted by his perception, we discover that the house is so complicated and so meaningful at the same time that it raises up a fundamental question: who is the house?

In *La maison d'Adam au Paradis*⁴ Rykwert (Theorist and architecture historian) emphasizes the house immutable anthropomorphis which, according to Filarete is credited to Adam, when excluded from Paradise, joined his hands over his head to protect himself from the diluvian. This need of protection gave then birth to the house and particularly to the prevailing iconography of the house with a protective triangular shaped roof.

Jacques Pezen-Massabuan, (geographer, 1930), has also written a lot about the house: Looking at every corner in the house, he finds it the best subject to study and he links it to the primitive human nature: «Man is mainly naked the most naked animal and the house is his clothing, his defence and his shelter»⁵

Khalil Gibran (Lebanese poet and painter, 1883-1931) expressed this thought differently «your house is your biggest body»⁶ and so has Jean Louis Le Run (childpsychanalyst): «The house is a shelter; it is the protective and cocooning body that reinforce you from outside the mother envelope. Home space stretches between outside and the inside not inside oneself but not outside. It is a hallway place. It is more or less wide according to the family history and its development varies according to cultures»⁷

For his part, Eguier A (psychiatrist and psychoanalyst), in his book *L'inconscient et la maison*⁸, considers the house as a cocoon tightening a hidden link between all those who live in it, a secure and comfortable place everyone appreciates and which is not only present in the unconscious but our unconscious makes it alive and finally, that the «house reflects what we are».

Gerard Wajeman (psycho analyst) , makes it sublime to the point that he considers the house as the reason of living for humanity by saying: «the first time a primate thought to build a shelter or to stay in a secure care or to wrap up his head with leaves, that day, with his house, humanity was born»⁹

So much has been written on the subject, a lot of ink spilled over. All that reminds us that the house remains a universal and inexhaustible subject. Home, this «being» that literature, poetry, painting and cinema have made alive and highlighted through many examples where it plays the part of a full character and sometimes the main character: It is certainly an inorganic object, but it is also a living one as attested by Sylvie Lavergne (psychomotor specialist) with these few words: «a field of sensorial experiences, with its scents, noises, warm and cold corners. The house is filled with noises [...] and scents [...]. The house lives»¹⁰

It could be said that the house is the man's partner. Its shape and structure have changed overtime. At the beginning its inhabitants used basic materials to build it, and then the house became more elaborated when man used sophisticated plans and resources: his knowledge, his skills, his cooperation with others, materials and technical means. In the past man was totally committed in building his house, but now he lives in a space designed by others and built by them. He will then cleverly try to create his own environment so that he comes as close as possible to what Gaston Bachelard called «la maison onirique».

Let see the relation that the child keep up with the house.

3. The child and the house

The personal development of the child is closely linked with the spaces in which he lives and which become a condition and a source of his/her development and, as stated by Jean Louis Le Run¹¹ (child psychiatrist), of all spaces attended by the child, the house is the one that helps him/her best to built his/her spatial marks and emotional references. In addition, it is admitted that every child needs a place where he would set up, then start to learn, understand and take possession of his environment, which will allow him to develop first his personal life with all the consequences that may occur either on the material or affective conditions. This place is the house. This place is not the only one but it remains not only the most important but also the place where the child lives and mould his sense of space and his/her psyche, it is «one of the biggest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of men [...] before being thrown in the world, man is laid in the cradle of the house»¹² Gaston Bachelard.

At first the only environment of the child is his/her mother, and then gradually, as his senses develop he/she begins to perceive people and the physical environment that surrounds him. The house becomes slowly more and more familiar, up to become his/her world, his/her universe.

The territory experienced expands gradually and only later, when around 10 years old can the child imagine the whole of the house, with the different rooms. And when he/she starts taking control of his movements begins to build it: in two dimensions, as drawings that he/she keeps repeating, then in three dimensions when he decides to build it.

This first house that we all have known is of basic aspect: create a space under a chair or a table, take up the inside part of a cupboard or a cardboard or simply a corner in a room. It uses for those flimsy or salvaged materials, cardboard, fabrics, rugs, and light furniture.

Thence, the child accepts the house, then he transforms it and finally he builds it according to his scale as soon as it has the means to do it, by taking «every corner» or by using some of the objects and by picturing on this space his own cultural and affective facts.

This almost universal gesture and even instinctive pushes the child to accepts his *bouita* (word used in dialectal arabic meaning: little house), as a prelude to the saga that will lead him to «built himself his house», once he becomes an adult and after having gradually ventured in the outside environment within the district, the city, the country and may be the world.

Thus the child discovers the house, saw the house, and then is able to conceive in the drawing and then to rebuild it to its scale as soon as its facilities permit by taking the corners or by using certain objects and projecting check out his own emotional and cultural data.

4. Drawing: An instinctive language

House drawing is a basic topic in the pictorial activity in general and is always present in the drawings made spontaneously by children. This has drawn an attention and we could not resist to his canvassing.

Indeed, drawing is a fast track to get access to the child's unconscious and its interpretation is the work of specialists of the psyche (psychoanalysts and psychologists). We had to be cautious in our approach and did not allow ourselves the right to interpret but only to check if this act of drawing the house was a vehicle in transmitting recurrent elements that the child would draw and that we should take into consideration during the design and development of the environment in general and the environment of the child in particular.

But what is drawing?

It is an universal means of expression (TRISTAN Garcia Fons, child psychiatrist, refers to it as a *graphic impulse*) which exists since the prehistoric era and which consists of a system of lines grouped to give a shape. It enables the child to express his feeling of the environment more easily than it would with words and thus to participate to the creation of the world.

Drawing is a means of expression to the child, a way to express his feeling and reflects the nature and feelings that he/she has towards what he experiences.

To be able to understand the drawings collected, we thought it was necessary to understand first the evolution of the child's drawing. We therefore referred to George-Henri Luquet who is one of the first authors who has observed and analyzed the evolution of child's drawing. His theory is based up on what he names as the realism which he divides in four main stages that we sum up below:

Between 1 and 2 years, the child can hold a pencil and has not always control on the first lines he draws. His graphic work is spontaneous and mainly the result of the movement dynamism: this is the time of scribble or drawing of various lines with no real will to depict something.

- The *fortuity realism*: between 2 and 3 years the child masters his mobility which enables him to control his style of drawing and enables him to be more and more accurate. He is able to establish links of formal likeness between his drawing and the elements of his environment and identities his work by naming it. He is in logic: «drawing/recognize/ name». During that period, he will force himself in improving this likeness.

- The *missed realism*: between 3 and 4 years, the child tries to transcribe the perception of external reality by forcing them to be realistic. The difficulties arise and are raised through perseverance and attention. He realizes this and goes a step by trying to replicate a shape and name what is going to draw: he the logic: «observe/name/draw».
- The *intellectual realism*: from 4 years old the child reconstructs reality from what he knows and not from what he perceives that is to say the drawing will contains many true elements of the object, even some of those we should not see. He uses the scale needed as it suits him. He takes down in the drawing the details which merge or hide in the reality and the transparency as often as needed.
- The *visual realism*: when around 10 years old, the child generally masters his ability to reproduce the chosen object as faithfully as possible.

From this age his creative genius begins to be overcome and he/she starts to reproduce stereotypes. The mistakes of adults trying to make him a draughtsman according to the established norms get hold of his aspirations and destroy his abilities to make «his» drawing.

Florence de Mèredien (philosopher and specialist of Modern Contemporary Art) reproaches the adults for exerting a negative and repressive influence on the child to drive him/her into rejecting the intellectual realism, filled with rich expressions and let him/her only draw through a common place visual realism; let us recall Picasso when he said : «First I used to draw like Raphaël, but it took me a lifetime to learn to draw like children».

II. Houses' words

We have collected children's drawings in education institutions of two districts in Algiers, which are Kouba and Bainem. In each of them, we have prospected in:

- A day nursery (children from 2 to 5 years);
- A school (children from 5 to 11 years);
- A college (teenagers from 11 to 15 years);

As teachers at a school of Architecture, we have asked 2nd year students (18 to 19 years) to join as a link between the children and the conceivers.

We have chosen these two districts because of their different characteristics. This will enable us to conclude on a general view.

Haring classified all the drawings in ascending order, year by year, we have observed them in two stages:

- First, we have observed the entire drawings one by one;
- Then, we have observed the drawings by year;

The drawings aspects have been listed within a matrix summing up the reading.

1. First stage reading of the drawings

The observation of all the drawings, made from the youngest to the oldest, allow us to make the following remarks:

- The houses resemble to faces and we came across various expressions: smiling, surprised, baffled etc.
- The sloping roof is practically used in all the drawings.
- The natural environment is present, from the widest (the sky) to the smallest (insect).
- All houses are detached houses, most of which are on the ground floor and are based in the middle of a garden.
- Plant is quite present.
- And what has drawn our attention, is that the houses are colored and cheerful.

2. Second stage reading of the drawings

A more in-depth and detailed observation of each drawing, according to age group and in ascending order from the youngest to the oldest children allowed us the following remarks the four periods described by G. H. Luguët.

The color

We have indeed appreciated the ease with which the children have used colors. The colors on the front show that the children are willing to see a more colorful environment, no more

glory houses with mental colors (white or beige) which is the case in their environment. Using the color is made in different ways:

- different parts of the houses have different colors;
- they use vertical stripes more than horizontal ones;
- color spots are distributed over the front;
- and when the house is a neutral color (formwork, beige) windows are in color and enliven the facade.

Getting from monochrome houses to the multicolored ones in their drawings seems like a firework display which questions our minds.

House's morphology

- The houses are detached houses and most of them on the ground floor (the subject has only mentioned *menziloukoum* (house in Arabic language)
- The sloping roof is omnipresent an icon which proves to be topical
- The houses look like faces where the mouth stands for the door and the two windows are placed symmetrically for the eyes. Besides, psychoanalysts and psychologists notice a similarity between the drawing of a house made by children and the face (or the body of human being) and for Freud, in the children's drawing, the house is only typical steady representation of the whole of the individual.

Few children have taken the characteristics of the houses currently being built and who invade their neighborhoods.

Openings (Doors and windows)

Essential parts of the house, openings are dealt with carefully and in a similar way through all the drawings.

- A path and/or a stair precedes the door just like an invitation to get into the house and using the doors latch seems to be the final right granted to get in that house

- Small windows without shutters and bars (although most houses in the vicinity have bars) are drawn symmetrically to the door. As regard the size, these small windows seem to be more exact compared to those being built currently with large openings that are immediately concealed.
- No balcony. Children ignored it (except in a few cases), although it is always present in Algerian houses but not uses as such (a contradiction to which many works are being devoted)

Eye for detail

Children are able to draw the details of their design elements. We can see it at every level: in the In the frame and in nature.

1. In the frame:

- In the frame: windows are drawn with woodwork details and the curtains are set on the windows.
- Doors are provided with a latch (drawn in different forms: from a simple dot to the sophisticated latch, which reminds me of Wittgenstein, a philosopher who built a house in Vienna in 1928 and draw a detailed latch), dormer window etc...
- The stair at the entrance is drawn with its steps and visors.
- Roof tiles, slabs, strips of wood, stones and in some cases are drawn with great care.

2. In the nature:

- Insects, snails, birds, flowers and fruit in the trees.
- The scale of drawing of these living things is exaggerated to be able to draw the details.

Nature

Nature is present on two scales basis: micro-environment or the house's garden and macro-environment or landscape.

- In the garden: most of the children have allowed themselves to draw at least two trees on each side, may be more. We can also find grass, flowers, fruit trees with prominently drawn fruit; and sometimes beds of vegetables growing.

Animals are depicted, birds, insects, snails, tortoise, sheep, dog or cat.

- In the landscape: the sky, the sun, clouds, man-made lakes (rivers, lakes...) mountains (for the children of Kouba's district who have got a nice view of the mountains) and the sea (for the children of Bainem's district of which location is on the seaside), show that children are good observant and don't forget these elements which are part of their environment.

All these elements of nature give to the house a foundation which is part of a world born within nature although this fact is often ignored in urban areas where people live children have not forgotten this reality and stick to it while adults, after having neglected it, are now trying to get back to it within the sustainable development precept.

Urban scheme

It is based on the hierarchy Front/Back which suggests:

- A front displayed with a front garden, that everybody can see and belonging to the metropolitan district
- A sheltered back, with back garden that we cannot see but imagine which belongs to the family and which is not displayed to public view.

We do not come across this scheme anymore in the children's districts since most houses are surrounded by a high wall and nothing can be seen of the ground floor: no garden, no door or flight of steps and where only the floors look onto the streets. The children feel punished because of their height and react by suggesting small fences which give the possibility to glance at the garden and the house which became within the view of everyone.

Social and human relationship scheme

1) Family and sentimental relationship.

- The family is present in the drawings of young people for whom home and family are one single entity.
- In many designs there is the presence of some hearts give the impression of flying through the house, then maybe this is the place where there are lots of affection and love to receive and give.

2) The social relations.

- The children from 10 to 11 years have depicted elements which secure the relationship with the others.

Game playing equipments (ex: swings), relaxing areas (garden's table, deckchair), sports activities (swimming pool, sport fields).

The boundary of the garden is just marked by a line or a fence which lays down the reference to the others from which we are different without being completely cut off.

The drawing of pavement and in some cases the street reminds us of the relationship with the district;

The garage expresses the possibility to get connected to the remaining part of the district and the city (by using the car).

This confirms that the child is aware of the relationship with the others, with the district and the city on which he sets his own rights.

The dimension scheme

The houses drawn by the children:

- Have, most of them, one floor (in their district, no more ground level houses, which are replaced by houses with several levels;
- When drawn on several levels they become narrower. An urban morphological reasoning which seems quite right.

The scale in which they are built seems to have a more humane aspect, although in the children's environment the houses have several levels (never a single one). The houses get bigger and bigger (we can even talk about oversize houses).

The dream world of the house

The houses they see in their environment are may be too complicated, not easy to understand, too big. They have no feelings towards them, they do not fit their scale, their world.

They were not tempted to copy their picture. What adults are building currently does not suit them at all. The drawings express it clearly.

The children have ignored the established styles, standard colored houses (white, beige) the gardens of which no one can give a glance at particularly the children because of their small height. They suggest small fences giving the possibility to glance at the garden which become within view of everyone. Their colored houses brighten the environment they suggest.

They are definitely not inspired by the urban scheme and architecture of their district and they do not want to reproduce them.

They hide in a world built by those who had offered them their tales, films and cartoons: the imaginary world of a homemade alive by story tellers and illustrators (draughts men and cartoonists).

This parallel and virtual world has influenced their memory more than the world of their environment with its reality which does not suit them.

Conclusion

Children were able to guess the mistakes and avoided them in their drawings. Wiser than adults, they like nature and respect it and try to reproduce it, avoiding to ignore it. Moreover, they try to remind us of other living creatures which they depict in their drawings with a lot of details as if they wanted to explain to us that they are not the only ones living in this world but others also are here. They respect the scale of human and try to transmit it through the dimensions of the houses they suggest.

They brighten their environment and make it look alive by simply bringing the color in it.

Thus, this works is a great and nice lesson of architecture in which we rediscovered a world to which we became insensible and that led us to a consciousness raising towards the environment approach.

It has allowed us to confirm that acting in consultation with children might help us understand what suits them and get closer to the reality which we have left behind and that would be easy to reconsider.

We have now to think about the way in which we should develop this first experience since we are convinced that it is a way which would help us go forwards together with our children through the city in better conditions.

Notes

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